

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 SEOUL 00457 180943Z
ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T SEOUL 0457

EXDIS

EO 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: MOPS KS US
SUJB: PRESIDENT PAK'S VIEWS ON TROOP WITHDRAWAL

REF: SEOUL 0383

1. GENERAL VESSEY TOGETHER WITH GENERAL (RET) FRED WEYAND, WHO IS VISITING KOREA ON BUSINESS, SPENT THE AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 16 WITH PRESIDENT PAK PLAYING GOLF AND TALKING OVER COFFEE. FOLLOWING ARE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONVERSATION WHICH PRINCIPALLY CONCERNED THE SUBJECT OF U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL. NOTABLY, PRESIDENT PAK TOOK A MUCH FIRMER LINE AGAINST WITHDRAWAL THAN THE LINE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SPEAKER CHUNG IL-KWON ATTRIBUTED TO PARK ON JANUARY 15 (REFTEL).

2. ACCORDING TO GENERAL VESSEY, PRESIDENT PAK MADE CLEAR HE DOES NOT WANT THE SECOND DIVISION WITHDRAWN, THAT HE BELIEVES IT IMPORTANT TO THE DETERRENCE OF WAR, THAT WITHDRAWING IT NOW WOULD BE A VERY POOR DECISION. PAK MADE THE POINT -- SOMETIMES EXPLICITLY, SOMETIMES IMPLICITLY -- THAT UNTIL ROK FORCES COULD DETER WAR THEMSELVES U.S. GROUND TROOPS WERE NEEDED. HE EXPECTS U.S. AIR FORCES TO REMAIN EVEN LONGER. PAK COMPLAINED ABOUT INCESSANT AND DISTURBING U.S. PRESS COMMENT ON TROOP WITHDRAWAL. HE THOUGHT THE PRESS WAS TRYING TO LEAD PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER

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TO A DECISION THAT CARTER HAD NOT YET MADE. THE KOREAN PEOPLE, SAID PAK, UNDERSTOOD U.S. FORCES WOULD BE WITHDRAWN SOME DAY BUT THEY EXPECT MANNER AND TIMING TO BE SLOW, CONSISTENT WITH THE SECURITY SITUATION, AND IN ACCORD WITH PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER'S STATEMENTS CONCERNING CONSULTATION WITH THE ROK.

3. IN HIS COMMENTS ON PRESIDENT PAK'S REMARKS, GENERAL VESSEY SAID THAT THE SUBJECT PREOCCUPIED PAK'S MIND THROUGHOUT THE AFTERNOON OF GOLF AND WAS CLEARLY OF GREAT CONCERN TO HIM. IN RESPONSE TO SEVERAL PROBES REGARDING POSSIBILITIES OF CHANGING THE STRUCTURE OF THE SECOND DIVISION SO AS TO ADD STRENGTH WHILE REDUCING OVERALL SIZE, PRESIDENT ACKNOWLEDGED POSSIBILITY BUT DID NOT PURSUE THE POINT WITH ANY ENTHUSIASM. GENERAL VESSEY CONCLUDES THAT PAK'S PENSIVENESS AND SERIOUSNESS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS DURING AFTERNOON WHEN SUBJECT WAS MENTIONED TOGETHER WITH HIS CONCERN ABOUT U.S. PRESS INFLUENCING DECISION INDICATES PAK IS WORRIED ABOUT BEING HANDED FAIT ACCOMPLI WITHOUT GETTING AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE HIS VIEWS AND CONCERNS KNOWN OR TO INFLUENCE TIMING BEFORE FINAL DECISION IS MADE.

4. ADDITIONAL POINTS MADE BY PRESIDENT WERE AS FOLLOWS:

A. SORT OF CHANGE IN THE SECURITY SITUATION HE PROPOSED WITH A NON-AGGRESSION PACT WERE THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH THE SECOND DIVISION COULD BE WITHDRAWN. IN THIS CONNECTION PAK MADE CLEAR HE EXPECTED U.S. AIR FORCE UNITS TO REMAIN IN KOREA EVEN IF NORTH KOREA AGREED TO A NON-AGGRESSION PACT.

B. RECOGNIZING CURRENT JAPANESE CONCERN ABOUT U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWALS AND SECURITY IN NORTHEAST ASIA GENERALLY, PAK NOTED THAT THIS WAS A CHANGE: WHEN THE SEVENTH DIVISION WAS WITHDRAWN, JAPAN WAS SILENT. JAPAN COULD FOSTER

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SECURITY THROUGH ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO ROK AND INCREASED ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH KOREA, PAK SAID EMPHATICALLY.

C. IN RESPONSE TO A COMMENT BY GENERAL WEYAND THAT NUMBER OF U.S. ALLIED LEADERS HAD BEEN SUBJECTED TO U.S. PRESS ATTACK, PAK SAID HE WELL KNEW THIS, BUT THAT HE NOW HAD BECOME NUMB TO THESE ATTACKS, HE THOUGHT THOSE U.S. JOURNALISTS HE HAD MET WERE INTELLIGENT BUT SOME WERE HEADSTRONG IN TRYING TO PRESENT THEIR OWN VIEWS TO THE READERS RATHER THAN PRESENTING THE FACTS.

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